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Middle East Situation Report #43
(As of 1100 EST, 24 February 1984)

LEBANON/SYRIA

President Gemayel believes that the US has abandoned him and that he is under extreme, conflicting pressures from Syria, Israel, and hardline Christians. 90 percent certain that Gemayel will go to Damascus within the next two days to abrogate the 17 May agreement.

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-- Abrogation of the 17 May agreement and an accommodation with Syria risks a Christian extremist move against him. Failure to do so would risk full-scale Muslim military attacks on Suq al-Gharb, the Green Line into Christian East Beirut, and possibly his home town of Bikfayya north of Beirut.

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Evacuation of US Marines is continuing, and by the end of the day 600-750 should remain.

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The Saudi-mediated cease-fire has already been violated by several exchanges of artillery fire along the Alayh ridgeline and near the president's palace.

A press report says that Sunni religious and political leaders in Beirut called yesterday for "distinctive" ties with Syria and for the abrogation of the 17 May accord.

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-- If accurate, this suggests that important segments of the Sunni community want to ally themselves with Syria and its allies. Such a move is likely to deepen the sense of panic in the Christian community.

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[redacted] Shia and Druze now want to translate their military successes into political gains. Various factions--particularly the Christian Lebanese Forces militia and Amal leader Barri--are exploring the possibility of a political dialogue.

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IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Iraqi and Iranian cities came under renewed artillery attacks Friday as fighting continues at Al Basrah and Chelat. [redacted] confirms Baghdad's claims that it stopped the Iranian assault east of Basrah and Iranian forces there are under heavy artillery bombardment. American journalists have confirmed Al-Qurna is still in Iraqi hands but that the Iraqis expect more Iranian attacks. Iraq bombarded Khorramadab and Borujerd Friday and claims to have downed an Iranian F-14. Iran claims to have destroyed two Iraqi divisions and to have captured

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five more Iraqi villages Friday in the battle area near Al Basrah.

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-- Unless Iraqi commanders make serious errors, their forces should be able to stop the Iranian assault north of Al Basrah. Iraqi helicopter gunships should be able to disrupt Iranian supply lines, which must come over about eleven miles of marsh and swamp.

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The International Red Cross is publicizing numerous violations of international law by Iran. Red Cross officials note Iranian mistreatment of a delegation sent to one of Iran's POW camps and Tehran's indoctrination of Iraqi POWs. Thursday Tehran radio reported that Iran has formally protested as "irresponsible practices" the decision by the Red Cross to publicize these accusations.

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PERSIAN GULF

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud told US Embassy officials in Riyadh that dissuading British arms sales to Iran will be a primary subject during Abdallah's visit to London.

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-- Abdallah's willingness to risk antagonizing Assad--with whom he has close personal ties--underscores Riyadh's concern with Iran's growing military aggressiveness.

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Conflicting reports about the latest Iranian attacks have prompted requests from Kuwaiti officials, local media representatives, and other diplomats for information on the fighting.

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